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Challenges: Nuclear Threat, Military Force, Drawdown

Prepared remarks of Secretary of Defense William J. Perry to the National Defense University graduating class, Fort McNair, Washington, June 15, 1994.

Thank you very much. ... Last week, I was in Normandy with President [Bill] Clinton to pay tribute to the heroic soldiers who fought, sacrificed and prevailed on those beaches 50 years ago. They prevailed because they were brave and selfless, but also because of their great fighting spirit and skill. They had that fighting spirit and skill drilled into them by a brilliant general named Lesley McNair. Right here at Roosevelt Hall, Gen. McNair led the U.S. Army's training with a clear vision of how the forces of freedom would prevail.

Even before D-Day, Gen. McNair knew victory would come to the individual soldier who, cold, wet, tired and afraid, dodging bullets, shocked by the blood and death around him, would fight on to defeat the enemy or die trying. Gen. McNair's vision prevailed on D-Day.

A few weeks later, he was killed near Normandy while observing the breakout from the beachhead — the highest-ranking American officer killed in action. But his legacy, the forces he shaped from this serene and stately campus, would live on and fight to defeat tyranny and change the course of the 20th century.

Those soldiers have given you, a new generation of soldiers shaped on this campus, an awesome duty. Your duty is to protect and to guarantee the freedom, the peace and the security they won at such great cost. To do this we must together reshape America's security policy and America's defense structure for this new post-Cold War era. Today I'd like to talk with you about the three challenges which we will face in responding to this new security environment.

The first challenge is to prevent a re-emergence of the nuclear threat which attended the Cold War. Today there is only one country — Russia — that has a sufficient number of nuclear weapons to threaten our national survival. Russia is no longer an enemy. It is now a partner. But in Russia and in the other countries of the former Soviet Union, the political, economic and social reforms that are under way have a very uncertain outcome.

As the Italian philosopher [Antonio] Gramsci said in an earlier day, "The old is dying, but the new cannot yet be born, and in the meantime, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." Ironically, Gramsci was talking in the 1930s about the supposed demise of capitalism. But today it can be truly applied to the actual collapse of communism.

The morbid symptoms which we see in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are deeply divided political systems, profoundly disaffected elites, political uncertainty, social dislocation and, certainly, political instability. Anybody who visits Russia or any of the surrounding countries today will see ample evidence of all of those problems. Meanwhile, Russia still has more than 20,000 nuclear weapons. Therefore, our policy in dealing with Russia has to take into account both the promise that comes with the ending of the Cold War and the danger of a recurrence of the nuclear threat.

So our efforts are directed, first of all, at doing what we can to prevent a recurrence of the nuclear threat; and, secondly, trying to nail down the gains we've already achieved. For example, we are helping the Russians dismantle their nuclear weapons. We are also helping them convert their massive defense industry. And we are helping to reform the former Red army so that it can operate under a democratic government with civilian leadership. All of these activities we have under way with resources and funds of the Defense Department — with resources formerly dedicated to finding ways of defending against Russia.

To the extent we can move this process farther along, we promote a safer and more secure world for the Russians, for ourselves and indeed for the whole world. As we do this, we must understand that we in the United States cannot control the outcome in Russia today, but we can influence it, and we must try.

A second challenge facing us in the Defense Department today is the need to reformulate policies for the use or the threat of use of military power. Philosophically, this is a difficult problem to even describe, much less formulate, and that's because in all of the foreseeable post-Cold War contingencies we have limited policy objectives.

I want to contrast that with World War II, which I was just discussing. In World War II it was easy to state what our objective was. It was victory. Indeed, it was total victory. We decided to use all of the power available to us to achieve that, up to and including nuclear weapons, which we were

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just developing.

During the Cold War our objective also was easy to state. We wanted to deter an attack from the forces of the Soviet Union, and we wanted to prevent a nuclear holocaust.

Military Force

Today the problems we face are more complex and very different. They do not threaten America's national survival. Our national interests are at stake, but not our supreme national interest. As we look at the different contingencies — whether they be regional war, peacekeeping or humanitarian operations — we see that each is different, but they all have one thing in common. That is, they are situations where our political objectives are limited and, therefore, the use, or even the threat of use, of military power has to be very selective.

The idea of military force solely as an instrument to achieve a dramatic solution has been obsolete for decades. Instead, we've used limited force to achieve limited objectives in every contingency involving the United States since World War II — including the Korean War, including the Vietnam War, including Desert Storm. In none of these cases did we use all of the military force that we could have.

In this post-Cold War era we are even less likely to rely on all-out military force to give us overwhelming victory. We're more likely to use selective force to achieve limited objectives. All of this means we must carefully select the means and level of our participation in any military operation.

To make the right decisions about how to use this force, we need some general guidelines on when and how to use force. First and most obviously, our national interests will dictate the pace and extent of our military engagement. Our level of military involvement must reflect our stakes. Where our supreme national interest is at stake, we will use overwhelming force and go it alone if necessary. Where the threat is less, we will be more selective in using force.

And we will seek the help of allies and multilateral institutions as much as feasible. Because many of the security challenges of this era are global in nature, they affect not only our interests but the interests of our friends and our allies. Consequently, the best response and in most cases the most effective response is likely to be a multilateral one.

U.S. Role in Bosnia

To give you a real world example I'd like to take a few minutes to discuss the hotly debated U.S. role in Bosnia. This is a clear example of a situation that falls in the middle ground, namely, one that involves our national interests but not our supreme national interests. The survival of the United States is not at stake in the war that's going on in Bosnia today. Therefore, it justifies a selective use of military power to achieve the limited policy objectives which we have.

What are our national interests in Bosnia today? First of all, and I want to emphasize this point strongly, we have a compelling national security interest in preventing that war and its consequences from spreading beyond Bosnia — indeed, beyond the Balkans. At the same time we have a humanitarian interest in trying to limit the violence and relieve the suffering while we are working for a peace settlement. These are real interests, and we take them quite seriously, but they are limited interests and our actions need to be proportional to our interests.

How do we advance these limited interests in an effective way and with appropriate levels of risk to our people and resources? Let me answer that question, first of all, by saying what our objective in Bosnia is not. It is not to become a combatant in the war. We are not seeking to win a military victory in Bosnia or even to fight a war in Bosnia.

Fundamentally, we are trying to accelerate the process of achieving a peace agreement in Bosnia, but understanding that that will take some time, we have three specific objectives while those peace negotiations are going on. The first of those is to limit the spread of the violence; second is to limit the effects of the violence; and the third is to mitigate the effects of the violence. Let me briefly describe what we're doing in each of these and particularly what we're doing with the use of military forces.

To limit the spread of violence we have deployed U.S. troops with the U.N. forces in (the former Yugoslav Republic of) Macedonia. Their presence monitors the border and acts as a deterrent to those who might wish to spread the violence southward, towards (the former Yugoslav Republic of) Macedonia, towards Kosovo, towards Greece and Albania.

To limit the violence we have committed American air power under NATO. We have applied air power to stop the aerial bombardment of cities in Bosnia by enforcing a no-fly zone. We've enforced this now for a year. Prior to that time there were numerous bombings of cities in Bosnia. Since that time there's been only one attempt, and in that attempt, NATO airplanes — U.S. airplanes, in fact — shot down the four Serbian bombers, and there has been no recurrence of that attempt since then. So this has been effective and successful in stopping that aerial bombardment.

We've also extended the NATO air power to prevent the artillery bombardment of cities, first of all with Sarajevo, and more recently we've extended it to Gorazde and other cities in Bosnia.

Let me put that in perspective for you. A little over four months ago the artillery shelling in Sarajevo often consisted of a thousand rounds a day being lobbed into the city. Almost 10,000 people had been killed by that bombardment over the course of something over a year. Since the enforcement of the

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Sarajevo no-bombardment zone more than four months have gone by without a single shell being fired into the city.

A third way we're using air power is to provide close air support to the U.N. forces on the ground, to facilitate the conduct of their operation of protecting the convoys that are going into the cities with relief supplies and their function of separating the combatants.

Finally, to mitigate the effects of the violence American air power has conducted a major humanitarian mission by airlifting and airdropping food, clothing and medical supplies into Bosnian towns. Since July of '92, we have conducted more than 5,000 airlift sorties into Sarajevo alone.

These measures, in combination, have saved the lives of tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Bosnians. This is a limited use of military power for a very selective objective, and it is working. It is very effective.

Reduction of Military Forces

Let me touch now on the third challenge which we face together, and that is the problem of properly managing the post-Cold War reduction of our military forces. We are about two-thirds of the way through a resource reduction now, which from the mid '80s to the mid '90s, will amount to about 40 percent in real terms. The challenge this presents you and me is how we can affect this 40 percent reduction and still maintain the quality and the readiness of our military force. Historically, we have not managed drawdowns well. Indeed, we've managed them very poorly.

After the Second World War we went through an even larger drawdown. We went from having the greatest military force in the world in 1945 to where five years later we were almost thrown off the Korean Peninsula by a third-rate regional power. Quite evidently we did not manage that drawdown properly.

We had a second chance after the Vietnam War, and that drawdown was about the size of the one we're going through today. Five years after that drawdown began Gen. [Edward] Meyer, the chief of staff of the Army, proclaimed that we had a "hollow Army," and he was right.

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What we did after Vietnam was decided to hold force structure constant and take the resource reduction in modernization of the forces and in the operation and maintenance of the forces. The results were totally predictable, and the term "hollow Army" was an accurate description of what resulted from that.

After the Vietnam War, and as a result of these decisions, the readiness, the professionalism and the morale of our fighting forces, in my judgment, were at an all time low. But the young NCOs and the young officers who were in the service at that time, those who decided to stay, vowed to rebuild the forces. Some of you are sitting in the audience today. You made that decision and took on the task of rebuilding our Army from the ground up.

We now, today, have the most capable, most professional military force in the world. This is the legacy that I have inherited as the secretary of defense, and my pledge to you is that I will not squander that legacy. I will maintain support and build on the capability of these military forces which we have today.

Effective Forces

My pledge to you, then, is that I commit to ensure that this nation continues to have the best trained, the best equipped and the most effective forces in the world. But to do this, with reduced resources, we have to manage it right. This time we've got to get it right.

We've been bringing down the size of the force to avoid having a large but a hollow force. As we reduce the force we have to maintain our commitment to readiness and effectiveness so that whatever our force size, person for person and unit for unit it is the most effective force anywhere in the world.

These reductions in force structure, by the way, have another full year to go. Then we expect to stabilize at a level which will amount to 1.45 million total people in the active military forces. From that point on we will have the advantage of a stable force structure. We will get to a smaller force, but continue to emphasize maintaining the quality of the people.

Today we have terrific men and women in uniform. I am counting on you, our new generation of military leadership, to support, to protect and to develop them.

As we commemorate D-Day, we are once again reminded that ensuring America's security comes down to the grit, the spirit and the resourcefulness of individuals. The allies triumphed at Normandy because the brave GIs who were inspired by Gen. McNair and others like him prevailed by seizing the initiative, making new plans amid uncertainty and pressing on against impossible odds.

I'd like to conclude my talk today with a favorite quote of mine from the British novelist Graham Greene, who wrote, "There always comes a moment in time when a door opens and lets the future in." The ending of the Cold War has opened such a door for our national security. The future is out there waiting to come in, and it's our task to shape that future to our country's advantage.

The completion of this course that you are taking has opened such a door for you. The future is out there waiting to come in for you as well. By your actions you can not only shape your own future, you can help shape our country's national security future.

Congratulations. Thank you, and best of luck to you.

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